

CUT YOUR UTILITY BILLS

Should You Replace Old Windows?

Q: I recently moved into an older home that's definitely not efficient. What upgrades should I consider?

A: Prepare yourself for a bit of sticker shock when you get your first bid to replace windows. To help you decide if you should replace your windows, consider a few factors.

Increased Comfort

The chill you feel near your windows when it's cold out is likely due to radiant heat loss. When you're near a cold surface, such as a window, you can feel chilled even if the temperature inside your home is warmer than 70 degrees.

The inside surface of an inefficient, single-pane window will be much colder on a winter night than that of a double- or triple-pane window.

Window coverings are one approach to increase comfort in your home. Curtains and blinds reduce radiant heat loss in the winter and can block unwanted heat gain in the summer.

Another aspect to comfort is the sun. If you have cold winters but lots of winter sunshine, you might enjoy the comfort and warmth of the sun streaming through your windows on a cold, clear day. If that's the

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Curtains are an affordable strategy to increase comfort and reduce energy use. PHOTO BY SCOTT VAN OSDOL

case, you should take this into consideration as you ponder window replacement. Some windows are better at letting the sun's heat into the home than others.

Appearance and Function

If your windows are older, new wood- or vinyl-framed windows can act as an exterior facelift. But keep in mind, if you own an older home with classic wooden windows, vinyl replacements might look out of place. It's possible to buy new windows that match the style of some older wooden windows, or you could decide to apply a little elbow grease to get them back into shape. Wooden windows, even if they were built before 1960, can last the life of the home.

Windows can provide ventilation, which sometimes

improves comfort more cost-effectively than air conditioning. Windows also need to be cleaned occasionally. If your existing windows don't provide ventilation or they are hard to clean, replacing them could solve these problems.

Resale Value

Windows are a major point of interest for most prospective homebuyers, which is why we often hear window replacement is good for resale value. But a 2019 study by the National Association of Realtors found that on average across the U.S., installing new vinyl windows costs about \$22,000 per home, but only increased resale value by \$16,500. Only 4% of real estate agents said the new windows helped close the sale.

Energy Savings

Homeowners often believe the best way to reduce energy use is to replace their windows, but this is rarely true. Companies that sell new windows

sometimes advertise greater energy savings than the new windows can actually deliver.

The amount of energy you save really depends on the efficiency of your existing windows compared to the efficiency of the replacement windows. An energy auditor can estimate potential savings, but most audits show that there are much more cost-effective efficiency investments than replacing windows.

On average, according to Energy Star, replacing single-pane windows in a 2,000-square-foot home with Energy Star-certified windows can save \$125 to \$340 a year, depending on where you live. At this rate, it would take a decade or more to pay off your initial investment.

Replacing old windows can provide a number of benefits, but it's a costly endeavor. By considering these factors and how long you plan to live in the home, you will be able to make the right decision. ■

